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## BOOK REVIEWS

### METHODS AND PRINCIPLES

*The American Indian: An Introduction to the Anthropology of the New World.* CLARK WISSLER. Douglas C. McMurtrie, New York, 1917.

Except for Brinton's *American Race*, this book is the first attempt to treat of the anthropology of North and South America together in a manner more than a compilatory one. The comparison with Brinton's book is in one sense unfair to Dr. Wissler. Not only have the available data increased greatly in the past twenty-five years, but Dr. Wissler has made a definite attempt to utilize all of them where Brinton only sketched or selected along the bent of his personal interests. The true resemblance to the earlier author's work lies in the fact that both have consistently viewed the two continents of the New World as a single unit and succeeded in keeping themselves free from the all too prevalent tendency to think of the peoples and cultures of Mexico and Peru as if they were one subject of study, and those of the less civilized regions as another.

How far Dr. Wissler's ambitious attempt will meet a need which the public feels, or imagines that it feels, will not be considered here; although the satisfaction of this need may well prove to be the greatest achievement of his work. The book is in any event of extreme importance in the history of anthropology; and will be discussed in that light.

Two prefatory statements by the author characterize the scope. First, his review of the native cultures and peoples of the New World is intended to serve as an introduction to the methods and viewpoint of anthropology generally. Second, his ideal has been to treat fundamental problems rather than to present a digest of all possible phases of native life.

Great skill is shown by his beginning with a consideration of food, and thereby sketching the areas of culture, as related to their environments, without any formal definitions. This plan allows of the orderly review of data through the twelve following chapters, the several types or provinces of culture emerging more and more clearly while the treatment remains free. In the same way the preponderating influence of the civilizations of the middle parts of America is more and more illumined and reinforced without the need of any direct demonstration. A whole series of maps drives this point home again and again, besides making

possible the assemblage of enormous masses of data. In this way are treated agriculture, tobacco, animal transportation, basketry, weaving, dress, footwear, pottery, decorative designs, sculpture, and clan organization. In practically every case the distribution on the map, even if unaccompanied by text, would suffice to give some considerable glimpses into history.

Nearly eight chapters are devoted to the material aspects of culture, a little more than one to art and knowledge, two to society, and two to forms of religion. This may seem a somewhat disproportionate division, but is on the whole a fortunate one. The author's personal experience has been most largely in the tangible phases of culture, a subject which he has for a number of years handled with distinction and made in certain ways peculiarly his own. His concrete mode of treatment, which is one of the particular merits of the book, is also more successfully applicable—at least in the present state of knowledge—to material than to social and religious culture. It is exceedingly doubtful, for instance, whether a map of ceremonial systems could have been constructed which would show as much as any of the maps mentioned. Finally, the author has as his clear aim historical reconstruction, and this end is of course better served by consideration of the basic and fundamental elements that lie close to the origins of culture than by examination of its more or less evanescent non-material efflorescences.

A new part of the book begins with chapter XIV, in which the culture areas that have so far been only indirectly recognized are formally defined and their cultural content enumerated. Here we have a series of compact masses of cultural elements, listed in passages that are scarcely readable but are of reference value. The following chapter presents the archaeological data in parallel manner; and a third takes up the subject of the chronology of cultures. This is a rather brief section confined to some reviews of data and previous endeavors, and to rather inconclusive hints. Dr. Wissler's method makes too predominant a use of geographical factors to allow him to press very far the few available indications of a directly temporal character; and his procedure in this matter is undoubtedly wise, because consistent with his method.

Two farther chapters are devoted to language and somatology. The treatment accorded language is slight. Not only philological problems as such are avoided, but also problems whose bearings would be distinctly ethnological although their method must remain a linguistic one: for instance, the question of the causes and rate of speech differentiation, of ultimate or at least continental origins, of unity or diversity of

inner type irrespective of origin. There can be no doubt that when even partial answers to these problems are rendered, they will yield enormous insights into the history of American culture. At the same time, the first attack on these points should come from linguistic students, just as their final disposal must be by linguists dealing with linguistic evidence. Dr. Wissler can therefore scarcely be criticized for evincing in these matters a caution that amounts to avoidance and that stands out in contrast with his spirited initiative in attacking other problems. The close ultimate relation which exists between linguistics and ethnology, with the latter as the chief gainer from the efforts of the former, is illustrated by the extent and depth of influence which the Powell classification of linguistic stocks has from the day of its promulgation exercised on every aspect of American ethnology. This family relationship of languages—which has recently again been brought to anthropological attention through an attempt to reconsider the evidence—is the only linguistic problem seriously touched on by Dr. Wissler. His attitude on the question of a further reduction of stocks may be described as sympathetic in spirit and guarded in fact.

The chapter on somatology reveals a similar attitude but is much stronger and fuller. There is no attempt to consider the causes of differentiation of physical types, but the types themselves, their groupings and their origins, are definitely inquired into. It is true that the proposed regional groupings cannot be accepted as fully established, and that the discussion of origins is also tentative. It must be borne in mind however that constructive syntheses of data in the physical anthropology of America have heretofore been rather conspicuously wanting. Considering this deficiency, and the brevity of treatment necessarily imposed on Dr. Wissler, the conclusions appeal as concrete, soundly arrived at, and definitely pointing out the way to further possibilities. They are clearly a step ahead.

Nevertheless, neither the sections on language nor on physical types can begin to compare in volume or detail of data or fineness of treatment with those devoted to culture; which fact is mentioned as a reminder of how far American linguistics and somatology have lagged behind American ethnology in achievement.

In chapter xix, the author reaches the kernel of his work: the correlations. He shows that his ethnological and archaeological classifications coincide to a remarkable degree, the only notable discrepancies being attributable to the disturbances of culture following the introduction of the maize complex, that is, agriculture. When this doubled cultural

classification is matched against the linguistic and somatological ones, the correlation is much weaker. Most modern anthropologists would have been so convinced of an absence of correlation that they would not have considered the matter at all, or would have contented themselves with pointing out a few striking instances of its failure. But Dr. Wissler is not afraid of fundamentals, nor does he hesitate to reexamine issues which tradition considers disposed of. His findings are best stated in his own words (p. 334):

We can, therefore, safely summarize our discussion by stating that each distinct culture area tends to have distinctive characters in language and somatology. However, the reversal of this formula does not hold, for people speaking languages of the same stock do not show a tendency to common culture characters unless they occupy a single geographical area. An analogous negation holds for somatology. It seems, then, that culture is one of the primary factors in this association, and that, due to causes we have not yet perceived, both languages and somatologies are differentiated after culture's own pattern.

On the question of the influence of migration he sums up (p. 336):

We are thus brought to the conclusion that the phenomena of our subject manifest a strong tendency to expand to the limits of the geographical area in which they arise, and no farther. Language and blood seem to spill over the edges far more readily than culture, from which we must infer that their dispersion is a by-product of migration, but that these migratory groups seem unable to resist complete cultural assimilation.

His treatment of the environmental factor is typical of a temperamental quality that pervades the entire book and which can perhaps best be characterized as one of liberality. Dr. Wissler's practical handling of environment would satisfy the requirements of the most ultra-modern methodology of cultural history. He does not once step even indirectly into the many tempting pitfalls of endeavoring to derive cultural content out of environment. On the other hand environment is never excluded from his consideration, in fact is kept in constant relation. There are few books, even among those of the most recent years, that so consistently attempt to show how culture makes use of its environment and how this utilization reacts on the culture itself. It is true that the outcome must be described as a recognition of tendencies rather than a formulation of principles; but these tendencies would probably be universally subscribed to. Again it is best to quote the conclusion (p. 340-1):

It appears a fair assumption that so long as the main sustaining habit-complexes of life remain the same in an area, there will be little change in material culture. This may be in part an explanation for the lack of close correspondence

between the historic cultures and archaeology in the several parts of the great maize areas in contrast to identity elsewhere. The bison, salmon, wild acorn, and guanaco must have been in their respective habitats for a long, long time, and a culture once developed around them could be displaced only by a radical change, such as the introduction of agriculture or pastoral arts. Now the regions where maize was found in use at the opening of the historic period are just those in which archaeology shows the most disparity. It seems then, that the environment as a static factor conserves the types of culture and because of this weighting of one of our three great groups of characters, breaks their unity, so that the same language and likewise the same blood may be found in association with different cultures according to the laws of historic accident.

There follows a chapter on the methods or mechanics of culture origin. This is really a theoretical discussion, with the American data used in illustration, and reapplications of the conclusions to the American field. Such findings are (p. 346):

The diffusion of material complexes has been by wholes. It was not merely a plant, a food, or an idea that was borrowed, but a complete method, with all of its associates. When however we turn to ceremonial practices and art, the case is less simple, for there seems to be a conflict between tribal patterns and the new trait.

It is no doubt this feeling that has contributed to induce Dr. Wissler to throw his main efforts on those simple cultural phases that yielded most generously under his treatment.

Again (p. 352):

We are left with a presumption that there are no direct functional relations between the several trait-complexes constituting a culture.

As regards the historical versus the biological conception of culture, the author makes it clear that he is not in the least tainted by any confusion. When however the statement follows (p. 353) that

anthropology is something more than the study of culture, it is essentially a coördinating and synthesizing science

we are in a position to realize the combination of sound method in detail with wide openmindedness—to some it may seem almost indecisive—which, with an unusual facility of assimilation of large masses of data, constitutes perhaps the most definite quality of the book.

The twenty-first and final chapter, on New World origins, concludes with a summary—sketched in outline in two scant pages—of the history of man and his culture in America. The author calls this a "hypothetical statement," but it may be presumed that his professional colleagues on

the whole will be more convinced of the essential soundness of his "theory" than of its practical utility. As a reconstruction it lacks the specific detail that makes a reconstruction impressive.

The Appendix of Linguistic Stocks, by Miss Bella Weitzner, is more than the name purports, being in fact a much needed table of American tribes. The bibliography is not a general one of the subject, but a list of references used.

It remains to comment on a few of the qualities of individuality displayed throughout the book. It is clear that finesses are deliberately eliminated. Separate facts are always suppressed, no matter how significant they may be aesthetically or emotionally, unless they definitely coordinate with considerable groups of other facts. Herein lies a possible danger to the appeal of the work to the wider public. It is not that the book is technical. Considering its range, it is marvelously free from technical terms and professional considerations. But it is a distinctly scientific book, without literary endeavor or flavor, or even serious inclination in that direction. And it may be questioned how large a hold on public interest any work may normally obtain which is not first of all a book and only incidentally a piece of science. *The American Indian* is distinctly a successful endeavor to be a piece of science.

Then, the book is much less the work of a craftsman who loves his material and his tools, than of a conceiver of undertakings, ready to extract value only where most profitable, and to scrap them instantly if yield can be increased. Dr. Wissler has looked almost wholly for mass results; and he has got them in a degree that makes all previous efforts in the same direction seem feebly puny. In the power of practical organization displayed, the book is characteristically American.

The author evinces remarkable balance of judgment. Always cautious, he is never timid; ever enterprising, he does not once become reckless. He looks into everything and faces any aspect impartially; if his conclusion comes out tentative, he is willing to have it so. He steers a mean course, equally clear from the Scylla of mere depiction and the Charybdis of theory spinning. The evolutionist, migrationist, and other snares that so regularly enmesh those with a weakness for deduction, never touch him. It is a pleasure to feel his apparently instinctive aversion from anything but inductive inference. He may be in error in many of his conclusions. He would no doubt be willing to be proved wrong in every conclusion, if thereby his science moved forward. He has moved it. The book traverses a long route; and there is scarcely a point touched but something is established which before was vague or obscure or postponed or unorganized.

Finally, the undertaking has one great import. The method of grouping culture elements and cultures by areas—or “centers” as Dr. Wissler likes to call them—and of tracing distributions, is not new. At least half of the anthropologists of this country have been reared in an atmosphere over which the concept of the culture area hovered insistently. But familiar as the concept was, it was somehow never applied consistently, as part of a larger scheme; and hence the virtues and inherent efficiency of the concept as a tool have never before been so clearly manifest, or been so productive of broad results, of actual historical reconstructions of subjects on which directly historical data are almost lacking. In England, the culture area concept has been almost wholly ignored, except now and then as a matter of form; and on the Continent, in spite of some half-systematic beginnings, it has tended to be neglected rather than utilized. If however the method which employs the culture area and the culture center is practicable for the attainment of large scale historical ends at all, there is no reason why it should be limited to America. It should be applicable with equal success to the African, Oceanic, and even Asiatic and early European fields. Here lies a promise—and a significant challenge. If this method proves useless against Old World phenomena, its value in the field of the New World and with it the value of this book at once become questionable. But if the systematic prosecution of this method, as best exemplified to date by Dr. Wissler's work, is genuinely productive, the entire science of anthropology, or at any rate its cultural portion, bids fair to be put on a new basis.

A. L. KROEBER

#### AMERICA

*Ancient Civilizations of Mexico and Central America.* HERBERT J. SPINDEN. (American Museum of Natural History, Handbook Series, no. 3, 238 pp.) New York, 1917.

This work from the hand of a leading authority should fill a long-felt want in the literature of Middle American archaeology: namely that for a popular, concise, and general presentation of the subject.

The purely technical treatise, even where the material is as rich and varied as here, possesses little interest for the general reader. He is soon lost in a maze of hypotheses, speculations, comparisons and expositions, wherein the very language used is not his own. The terminology is strange; the subject-matter, unfamiliar; and he wearies of the effort before his interest is aroused.

The present volume is especially designed to meet his particular needs. It is essentially a book for the general reader; and as such is